

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

30 August 2013

Europe

UK Hovis bakery workers take action over zero-hour contracts

At least 200 production workers at the Hovis bakery in Wigan began a seven-day strike Wednesday in a dispute over contracts and pay.

Staff were balloted for industrial action over the introduction of agency staff and zero-hour contracts that do not specify set working hours and give limited guarantees on conditions.

The walkout comes after 26 workers were laid off in April and plans to make another five workers redundant and cut hours from 52 to 40 per week. Agency workers were brought in almost immediately after the redundancies in April.

The Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) has said that it believes that Premier Foods plans to use agency workers to take on work that is likely to fall to the Wigan bakery after the closure of Hovis bakeries in Birmingham and London. The action at the Wigan bakery—one of 10 Hovis sites in the UK—could hit deliveries of bread in the north-west.

UK postal staff in dispute

Around 4,000 postal workers at 372 Crown Post Offices struck again this week in an ongoing dispute over office closures, jobs and pay.

Postal workers across the UK voted to strike on Saturday. The workers fear hundreds of job losses as a result of the plans to franchise or close dozens of Crown offices, as well as being forced to accept a three-year pay freeze.

The latest industrial action constitutes days 10 and 11 in a five-month dispute.

Crown Post Offices are the biggest branches in larger towns and cities, making up three percent of the entire Post Office network and handling around one fifth of customers.

Strike notice among pilots of Azores-based airline

On August 20, the National Civil Aviation Workers Union (SINTAC) issued a strike advance notice regarding a stoppage to be carried out by SATA Airlines' workers from September 1 through December 31.

The dispute is over concerns about labour policies drafted in a memorandum of understanding by SATA Airlines regarding working overtime, breaking time, on-call employee policies and working on holidays.

SATA Airlines' pilots staged strikes in April and May over the same concerns as well as those regarding budget reductions, job security, layoffs and pay cuts.

Based in the Azores, SATA Airlines links the nine islands of the Azores with Portugal's mainland, Europe and North America.

German lock workers suspend action

The German public sector union Verdi suspended strike action on the country's 7,500 kilometres of river canal systems this week for talks with the government.

The "pause" comes after a series of rolling strikes over the last weeks, which have caused widespread disruption. The government plans to "downsize" the state-run Waterway and Shipping Administration, which employs 12,500 people. In response, Verdi is calling only for negotiations on wages and "job security."

Middle East

Foreign labourers strike in Bahrain

Up to 500 workers went on strike August 24 demanding better living conditions and increased wages following the suicide of a colleague.

"They were also outraged by the death of their Nepali colleague, who took his own life on Thursday under mysterious circumstances after only being in Bahrain for 20 days," said *Gulf Daily News*.

Deu Ram Rai, 22, hanged himself at the company's labour camp. The workers say Rai was denied any sick leave, despite being "very" ill. There was tight security following the death and four police patrols were sent to the camp.

The labourers—from Nepal, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh—staged an indefinite strike, demanding additional vacation days and a canteen inside their Sitra accommodation. A Nepali labourer, who wished to

remain anonymous, said they will continue the strike until their demands are met. “We will not stop the strike until the company meets our simple demands,” he said. “We want to get better pay and better food in our accommodation instead of facing troubles to find transport to buy our own food every day.”

Another worker said of the five-storey camp. “A few months ago, four people stayed in one room but now there are eight to nine people in the same room,” he said. “It’s a five-storey building but we are crammed into small rooms with no food and other facilities.”

Egypt’s Mahalla textile workers strike

Up to 10,000 shift workers at the Egyptian public sector Weaving and Textile Company in Mahalla City started industrial action Monday, claiming the company’s administration had not adhered to the payment deadline for their profit-sharing bonus.

“Mahalla workers, totalling around 24,000, went on strike last month after they were paid only half of their agreed bonus (the equivalent of 45 days salary). Management promised they would receive the remaining sum with their August paycheques, but this didn’t materialise,” said *Ahram online*.

The striking workers are also demanding the dismissal of the head of the Holding Company for weaving and spinning, Fouad Abdel-Alim, and the suspension of the current state-run trade union committee, which has sided with management.

Africa

Tanzania Zambia railway workers fired

Workers employed by Tazara, the Tanzania Zambia railway, went on strike last week over non-payment of wages. They have not been paid since May. Tazara said they had not followed proper procedure and deemed the strike illegal. At the start of this week, Tazara sacked around 1,000 employees who had not reported for work.

The nearly 2,000-kilometre railway line connects the Zambia interior to the Tanzanian port of Dar es Salaam and is used to take ore from Zambia’s copper and cobalt mines.

Nigerian health workers end strike

The strike of hospital workers under the auspices of the Joint Health Staff Union of Nigeria (JOHESU) that began last week has been called off, following negotiations on Tuesday between JOHESU and the federal government.

At the end of the meeting both parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which included issues such as the constitution of management boards at teaching hospitals, the implementation of a 2008 job evaluation report and the retirement age.

Nigerian university staff protest threat of salary withdrawal

Staff at the Osun State University, Osogbo, belonging to the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) and the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT) held a protest on Wednesday against the threat by university management to withhold their pay.

The workers are currently on strike demanding implementation of a hazard allowance, payment of arrears, and payment of an overtime allowance. They began their strike Wednesday of last week.

South Africa hit by series of strikes

On Monday, technicians working for South African Airways (SAA) went on indefinite strike. They are members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) and are demanding a 12 percent pay increase. SAA management have offered 6.5 percent.

Around 140,000 construction workers also went on strike Monday, after talks at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) broke down. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) represents 90,000 of those involved, while the Building Construction and Allied Workers Union (BCAWU) represents 50,000.

The strike affects around half of civil engineering companies in South Africa. They are demanding a 13 percent increase this year and a 14 percent pay increase next year.

The strike by autoworkers, which began last week, continues. They are demanding a 14 percent pay increase. Around 30,000 workers are involved in the strike; they are members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). South Africa’s auto industry is responsible for 5 percent of the country’s GDP.

On Tuesday, NUMSA announced that 72,000 members working in petrol stations and car dealerships would strike next Monday. Talks between NUMSA and the employers’ bodies, the Fuel Retailers Association and the Retail Motor Industry Organisation over a pay increase, deadlocked in July.

Gold miners represented by the National Union of Mineworkers have voted to go on strike if their pay increase demands of up to 50 percent are not met. The NUM have withdrawn from talks with the Chamber of Mines whilst the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) and the Solidarity union are continuing the talks. AMCU has asked for a 150 percent pay increase. The gold producers are offering 6 percent.



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